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Rape Attribution for African-American

Undergraduate Students

Imani Mandela

Georgia State University

Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative research project is an examination of the influence of gender on the attribution of blame for rape among African-American undergraduate students at Georgia State University. The attribution of blame in a rape scenario (male perpetrator/female victim) will be presented in four pairings, manipulating the race (Black/White) of the victim and perpetrator. The attribution of blame will be measured using a modified 5 point Likert-scale and 14 point Likert-scale based on two pre-existing rape attribution scales: Kanekar and Kolsawalla's "Responsibility and Imprisonment" 21 point scale (1988) and George and Matrinez's "Victim Blaming" 10 point Likert-scale (2002). The researcher will use SPSS to determine whether or not significant gender differences in the attribution of rape are apparent in each of the scenarios. Gender issues remain a comparatively unexplored area of research within African-American Studies. This research may bring attention to the degree to which the attribution of responsibility for rape is both raced and gendered within the African-American community. In doing so, this research will potentially provide an additional platform on which more open and honest dialogue between African-American men and women can occur.

Keywords: rape attribution, gender studies, undergraduate students, criminal justice

Rape Attribution for African-American
Undergraduate Students

Race and gender may significantly influence people's assumptions and perceptions about accusations of rape, but how this influence works among African-American students has not been well-studied. Perhaps a newspaper article details a developing story regarding an alleged rape. A black athlete is accused of raping a white woman after she willingly meets him in his hotel room at 2 am. Some might immediately assume the athlete is guilty, while others doubt the authenticity of the woman's rape accusation. Would opinions change if the situation remained the same but instead the victim was black and the perpetrator was white?

Background

Though legal scholars have acknowledged that decision-making in all trials is often biased (Bryden & Lengnick, 1997), most people would likely suggest that the evidence in an alleged rape case dictates their attribution of blame and that race is an inconsequential factor. There are trends in the literature that are not related to race that would seemingly support this "colorblind" contention yet concurrently destabilize the notion that the evidence in a rape trial is the sole influence on jurors' decisions. For example, generally, the jurors' empathy with the victim predicts sentencing recommendations. Jurors with a high level of empathy for the victim recommend longer sentences for the perpetrator (Dietz, Blackwell, Daley & Bentley, 1982). A study of actual rape cases concluded that physical attractiveness had a significant effect on jurors' decisions; the study found that good looking defendants were less likely to be found guilty, attributing it in part to "the traditional assumption that rape is due to sexual frustration... [so] a handsome man must be innocent because he doesn't need to resort to rape" (Bryden et al., 1997, p.1227). In addition, "Researchers who study rape trials have frequently concluded that misinformation [also known as rape myths]...concerning the nature, causes and consequences of forced sexual conduct", to some extent, affects the outcomes of rape trials (Giacopassi & Dull, 1986, p.63). Another trend not related to race is that jurors frequently "fail to recall the evidence accurately, become confused by complex trials...and become influenced by irrelevant information" (Pfeifer, 1990, p.231). Though these and other "colorblind" trends exist, archival studies of rape cases indicates that the defendant's race commonly influences the attribution of guilt and sentencing decisions (Bryden et al., 1997;

Pfeifer, 1990). In some cases, this is influenced by attorneys who “appeal to racism in order to secure convictions” regardless of whether or not racism is evidenced in the written record (Clay, 1993, p.2355). Thus, many studies have centered on exploring the impact of race in rape trials by having participants in studies serve as a mock jury or evaluate alleged rape scenarios.

Literature Review

The Impact of Race on Attribution

A positive relationship has been observed between racial dissimilarity and the attribution of guilt and/or negative traits (Ugwuegbu, 1976; Donovan, 2007). Additionally, ingroup bias serves a moderator for attribution judgments. A victim who is the same race as the participant receives a more “favorable perception” than those that are outside the participant’s race (Harrison, Howerton, Secarea & Nguyen, 2008, p. 722). Similarly, rapists are deemed more guilty when a victim is of the same race as the participant than when the victim is not (Harrison, et al., 2008). However, some research has contradicted these findings. When victims are assaulted by a perpetrator outside of their race, they are attributed more blame and their refusals of sex are deemed less credible, and this is consistent for both Black and White victims (George & Martinez, 2002). Additionally, juror bias can be especially pronounced when an alleged White victim accuses a Black defendant of rape (Bryden et al., 1997; Clay, 1993).

Participants generally recommend longer sentences for Blacks than Whites (Szymanski, 1993). One study found this to only be the case when the defendants were young adults, with older white and black offenders receiving similar sentences and, furthermore, that, for all crimes, young black males “receive the most severe sentences of any race-age-gender category” (Steffensmeir, Ulmer & Kramer, 1998, p. 786). The same study also concluded that “among female defendants...the race effect persists across all ages—younger as well as older black female defendants are sentenced more harshly than their younger and older white counterparts” (Steffensmeir et al., 1998, p. 786). Another study found that the race of the victim plays a role in sentencing decisions, when the “victim was black, black and white perpetrators were treated similarly. However when [the victim] was white, the black defendant received a more severe punishment” (Feild, 1979,

p. 278). Thus, there are some instances of egalitarianism in regards to sentencing, but in general Blacks receive harsher sentences than Whites.

The Impact of Gender on Attribution

As illustrated, researchers that explore attribution in rape trials have observed consistent trends related to race. Given the inclusion of both male and female participants in mock and actual rape trials, trends have also emerged that evidences significant differences between men and women regarding attribution and sentencing decisions.

A consistent trend shows that males are more likely than females to see the perpetrator as less culpable and/or the rape survivor as being more promiscuous (Donovan, 2007; Szymanski, 1993). Female participants are more likely to see the perpetrator as more responsible and to be more empathetic towards the victim than men (Knight, Giuliano, Sanchez-Ross, 2001; Grubb & Harrower, 2008). Additionally, women are more likely to believe an accusation of rape than men (Bryden et al., 2007). Perceived similarity to the victim may also influence the attribution of both male and female participants (Schwartz and Lundgren, 2002).

Men recommended harsher sentences for Black perpetrators than White perpetrators (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005). In addition, women favor harsher sentencing recommendations (Knight et al., 2001; Grubb et al., 2008). One study that compared perpetrators that were acquaintances and perpetrators that were strangers found that men recommended longer sentences for Black perpetrators that were strangers than White perpetrators that were strangers (George et al., 2002; Grubb et al., 2008). Another study found that Black participants, both male and female, were more lenient on Black defendants than White defendants, which is consistent with previous research and actual rape trial cases (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000).

Limitations of the Literature

Though there are persistent trends in the literature, some prominent inconsistencies have emerged. The influence of the gender of the participants and the race of the victim/perpetrator on the attribution of rape has not been consistent across studies, resulting in different and often contradictory results and conclusions (George et al., 2002; Steffensmeier et al., 1998). Furthermore, some researchers have noted that the effect that the race of the victim/perpetrator on the attribution of rape may have been exaggerated in studies that did not

include forensically relevant variables such as judge's instructions (Bryden et al., 1997). In addition, the literature itself may be biased towards the findings of the time frame 1970-1980s; the "observable decline in published social psychological research [on the subject] over the past fifteen years" has caused the overrepresentation of this period in the literature (Grubb et al., 2008, p. 402). Finally, researchers have not fully addressed the implications of racism in rape trials due to their rare inclusion of a predominately minority sample. An all white, and to a lesser degree a predominately white, sample is used in studies. (Willis, 1992; George et al., 2002; Giacomassi et al., 1986; Donovan, 2007). Some authors (Dietz et al., 1982; Vicki et al., 2003) have shown variance in the studies' sample by manipulating the gender and/or age of the participants; while other authors (Willis, 1992; Knight et al., 2001; Burt et al., 2003; Howard, 1984) have done so by diversifying the focus of the study (i.e. rape attribution in a case involving ecstasy, date rape, a married couple, etc.).

Thus, the significance of race is almost always viewed in terms of White participants and cannot be applied to and is not necessarily representative of the larger population. The foregoing issues, as a whole, presently limit the conclusions that one can draw about the impact of race in rape trials. With those limitations in mind, the researcher would like to enrich the discourse by providing insight into the ways in which African-American undergraduate students attribute blame in a rape trial. Additionally, gender issues remain a comparatively unexplored area of research within African-American Studies (Collins, 1989). This research may bring attention to the degree to which the attribution of responsibility for rape is both raced and gendered within the African-American community.

Research Questions

Core Question

Do African-American men and women attribute blame for a rape differently?

1. Sub-question: Does the race of the victim influence attribution of responsibility?
2. Sub-question: Does the race of the perpetrator influence attribution of responsibility?

Hypotheses:

1. There will be a significant difference between males' and females' attribution of responses.

2. There will be a significant difference between the participants' responses to the scenario (which features different racial pairings)

Method

The study used a quasi-experimental, convenience sample (Creswell, 2003). The participants' responses that were analyzed were African American undergraduate students. The sample design for this population was multistage (Creswell, 2003). The students were recruited using two sampling methods. The first method was to contact prospective participants through the social networking site Facebook. The prospective participants were asked to participate in the study and a web link to the online survey was included in a Facebook message. In all, 201 students were recruited using this method that met the criteria outlined for this study. The second method of recruitment was asking professors teaching undergraduate African-American Studies courses at Georgia State University to offer extra credit to students who completed the study's online survey. In all, 47 students were recruited using this method that met the criteria outlined for this study. The target size of the sample was 200 students; the researcher met this target with the total participant tally of 248 responses.

Participants

A total of 2,940 people were contacted through the social networking site Facebook to participate in an online survey. Of these, 416 completed the survey. The initial sample was 38% male and 62% female. Additionally, 64.9% identified as African-American, 14.7% identified as Asian, 13.9% identified as White, 1% identified as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and 0.5% identified as Native-American. When asked during the online survey if they were students, 91% answered yes and 8.4% answered no. The researcher was interested in the rape attribution of students so responses from non-students were removed. Additionally, the intended purpose of the research was to expand the literature regarding rape attribution by using an all-African American sample. Consequently, all non-African Americans participants were removed from the data set. In all, 160 responses were removed from the data set because they identified as non-African-American and 35 responses were removed because they identified as non-students. Lastly, 13 participants were removed because their responses were incomplete. In the final sample there were 235 participants. 100% (235) identified as Black,

100% (235) identified as a student, 64.1% (159) identified as female and 35.9% (89) identified as male. 47 of the participants received extra credit from their African-American Studies instructor(s) for participating in the survey.

Materials

The researcher used survey research design and data was collected through the use of a cross-sectional survey (Creswell, 2003). The participants' attitudes were assessed through a non-fictional rape scenario that was formulated from the trial transcripts of Mike Tyson's 1994 rape trial. The rape scenario depicted a heterosexual encounter between a celebrity boxer and a beauty pageant contestant. The scenario begins by describing the events before the rape, where the two met, what time they decided for their date, etc. Instead of continuing to provide an objective description of what happened, which might imply that both parties agree on what occurred, the participants were given the perpetrator's and victim's versions of the encounter, yielding a "he-said-she-said" context. The following is the scenario used in the study:

At an annual city-wide event in a mid-size city in the Midwest, the alleged perpetrator, a successful professional heavyweight boxer (--insert race--, 5'11, 220 pounds) visited the contestants of a beauty pageant scheduled in conjunction with the event. During a late afternoon break in the rehearsals, he met the alleged victim, a contestant in the pageant (--insert race-- 5'4, 108 pounds). They shared a brief conversation and exchanged contact information after which he invited the alleged victim out on a date later that evening. At 1:36 am, he called her room and invited her out. She hesitated because of the time but after some encouragement from her roommates, she went to the lobby of the hotel where he was waiting in a limousine. Her statement indicates that she anticipated going out and meeting celebrities. His statement indicates that he made no such promises and simply invited her out. They chatted for a short time and then rode across the street to his hotel. At this point, she indicates that he mentions something about needing to go to his room for something before going out. His statement indicates that he simply invited her to his room. Once in the room, they again shared conversation after which she contends that he raped her. He contends that the sex was consensual. The jury ruled that the defendant was guilty of rape.

In order to minimize the effect of situational factors as influences on rape attribution, the mention of a weapon, violence (aside from the rape), and alcohol were not included in the rape scenario. The race of the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator was factorially crossed between Black and White creating four rape scenarios with four different pairings: (1) White victim/White perpetrator (WV/WP), (2) White victim/Black perpetrator (WV/BP), (3) Black victim/White perpetrator (BV/WP) and (4) Black victim/Black perpetrator (BV/BP). The four racial pairings were randomly assigned to participants based on their birthday months. Those born in January, February or March received the first racial pairing, those born on April, May or June received the

second racial pairing, those born in July, August or September received the third racial pairing and those born on October, November and December received the fourth racial pairing. The racial pairings were distributed in the data set as follows: The WV/WP group represented 28.2% (70) of the sample, The WV/BP group represented 23.4% (58) of the sample, The BV/WP group represented 20.2% (50) of the sample and the BV/BP group represented 28.2% (70) of the sample.

Measures

This study was designed to measure three attributions towards the alleged rape victim and perpetrator: attribution of believability, responsibility and sentencing. To measure believability, the participants were asked “Who are you inclined to believe”? Their responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale with 1=completely believes female and 5=completely believes male. To measure responsibility, the participants were asked “Who do you hold responsible for what happened”? Their responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale with 1=holds female completely responsible and 5=holds male completely responsible. To measure sentencing, the participants were asked “In this state, the crime of rape, a class B felony, carries a sentence of 6-20 years. What should the length of his sentence be (between 6 and 20 years)?” Their responses were recorded on a 14-point Likert scale that ranged between 6 and 20 years.

Variables

The independent variables in the study were self-identified gender and scenario. The dependent variables in this study were believability attribution, responsibility attribution and sentencing attribution. These dependent variables were defined as the attribution of believability, responsibility and sentencing for rape among the following pairings: 1) White victim/White perpetrator 2) White victim/Black perpetrator 3) Black victim/White perpetrator 4) Black victim/Black perpetrator. The dependent variable was measured using the aforementioned questions.

Analysis

Using SPSS, separate 4 (scenario) x 2 (gender) ANOVAs were conducted for each question to determine whether or not there was a significant interaction between scenario and gender.

Results

Believability

A two-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender on believability. Subjects were divided into four groups according to the scenario they received: Group 1: White victim/White perpetrator (WV/WP); 2: White victim/Black perpetrator (WV/BP); Group 3: Black victim/White perpetrator (BV/WP); Group 4: Black victim/Black perpetrator (BV/BP). There was a statistically significant main effect for the groups [$F(3, 235)=6.363, p<.05$], the effect size was medium [partial eta squared=.075] (See Table 1). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that

**Table 1: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for
Dependent Variable Believability**

Dependent Variable: Believe

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	15.928 ^a	7	2.275	3.479	.001	.094	24.352	.966
Intercept	1841.771	1	1841.771	2815.942	.000	.923	2815.942	1.000
gender	.110	1	.110	.169	.681	.001	.169	.069
Group	12.484	3	4.161	6.363	.000	.075	19.088	.966
gender * Group	1.263	3	.421	.643	.588	.008	1.930	.184
Error	153.702	235	.654					
Total	2215.000	243						
Corrected Total	169.630	242						

a. R Squared = .094 (Adjusted R Squared = .067)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Note: This is an ANNOVA display showing the two-way between groups analysis of variance to observe the impact of gender on believability. There was a statistically significant main effect for the groups ($p<.05$) and the effect size was medium (partial eta squared=.075). These are circled in red.

Group 1 (WV/WP) ($M=2.90, SD=.715$) was statistically significant from Group 2 (WV/BP) ($M=3.32, SD=.909$); Group 2 (WV/BP) ($M=3.32, SD=.909$) was statistically significant from Group 3 (BV/WP) ($M=2.65, SD=.663$); and Group 2 (WV/BP) ($M=3.32, SD=.909$) was statistically significant from Group 4 (BV/BP) ($M=2.74, SD=.885$) (See Table 2 and 3).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Believability

gender	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1	1	2.80	.847	30
	2	3.32	.646	22
	3	2.79	.631	19
	4	2.83	.857	18
	Total	2.93	.780	89
2	1	2.97	.592	38
	2	3.31	1.051	35
	3	2.57	.679	30
	4	2.71	.901	51
	Total	2.88	.870	154
Total	1	2.90	.715	68
	2	3.32	.909	57
	3	2.65	.663	49
	4	2.74	.885	69
	Total	2.90	.837	243

Note: This is an ANNOVA display showing the descriptive statistics on a two-way between groups analysis of variance conducted to observe the impact of gender on believability. For gender, 1=male and 2=female. The mean for Group 2 for both genders is higher than the other groups. These are circled in red. Observation of these statistics was followed by analysis of Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test to confirm statistical significance.

Table 3: Tukey HSD Post-hoc Test for Believability

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	-.42 [*]	.145	.022	-.79	-.04
	3	.24	.152	.375	-.15	.64
	4	.16	.138	.663	-.20	.52
2	1	.42 [*]	.145	.022	.04	.79
	3	.66 [*]	.158	.000	.26	1.07
	4	.58 [*]	.145	.001	.20	.95
3	1	-.24	.152	.375	-.64	.15
	2	-.66 [*]	.158	.000	-1.07	-.26
	4	-.09	.151	.941	-.48	.30
4	1	-.16	.138	.663	-.52	.20
	2	-.58 [*]	.145	.001	-.95	-.20
	3	.09	.151	.941	-.30	.48

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = .654.

Note: This is an ANNOVA display showing a Tukey HSD Post-hoc comparisons test on a

two-way between groups analysis of variance conducted to explore the impact of gender on believability. Subjects were divided into four groups according to the scenario they received: Group 1: White victim/White perpetrator (WV/WP); 2: White victim/Black perpetrator (WV/BP); Group 3: Black victim/White perpetrator (BV/WP); Group 4: Black victim/Black perpetrator (BV/BP). Group 2 (WV/BP) was statistically significant ($p < .05$) from all the other groups. This is circled in red. Using the information from Table 2, this means that males and females believed the black perpetrator over the white victim at a statistically significant rate when compared to the other groups and appears to indicate a bias against the white victim.

Responsibility

A two-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender on responsibility (See Table 4). There was not a statistically significant main effect for gender [$F(1, 235)=.707$, $p=.40$] or for the scenarios [$F(3, 235)=.859$, $p=.46$]. The main effect for the interaction effect [$f(3, 235)=.651$, $p=.58$] also did not reach statistical significance (See Table 4).

Table 4: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Dependent Variable Responsibility

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	3.789 ^a	7	.541	.773	.611	.022	5.408	.330
Intercept	2067.704	1	2067.704	2951.369	.000	.926	2951.369	1.000
gender	.495	1	.495	.707	.401	.003	.707	.133
Group	1.806	3	.602	.859	.463	.011	2.578	.236
gender * Group	1.369	3	.456	.651	.583	.008	1.954	.186
Error	164.639	235	.701					
Total	2508.000	243						
Corrected Total	168.428	242						

a. R Squared = .022 (Adjusted R Squared = -.007)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Note: This is an ANNOVA display showing a two-way between groups analysis of variance conducted to explore the impact of gender on responsibility. There was not a statistically significant main effect for gender ($p=.40$) or for the scenarios ($p=.46$). The main effect for the interaction effect ($p=.58$) also did not reach statistical significance. These are circled in red. This means that genders attributed responsibility similarly and the participants attributed responsibility similarly in scenarios that featured different racial pairings. Since there was no interaction effect, it means the main effects collectively explain all of the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Sentencing

A two-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender on sentencing decisions (See Table 5). There was not a statistically significant main effect for gender [$F(1, 235)=.374$, $p=.54$] or for the scenarios [$F(3, 235)=2.114$, $p=.1$]. The main effect for the interaction effect [$f(3, 235)=.584$, $p=.63$] did not reach statistical significance (See Table 5).

**Table 5: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
for Dependent Variable Sentencing**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	228.706 ^a	7	32.672	1.627	.128	.046	11.391	.667
Intercept	20113.095	1	20113.095	1001.762	.000	.810	1001.762	1.000
gender	7.513	1	7.513	.374	.541	.002	.374	.093
Group	127.338	3	42.446	2.114	.099	.026	6.342	.536
gender * Group	35.146	3	11.715	.584	.626	.007	1.751	.170
Error	4718.265	235	20.078					
Total	27906.000	243						
Corrected Total	4946.971	242						

a. R Squared = .046 (Adjusted R Squared = .018) Note: This is an ANNOVA display showing a two-way between groups analysis of variance conducted to explore the impact of gender on sentencing. There was not a statistically significant main effect for gender (p=.54) or for the scenarios (p=.1). The main effect for the interaction effect (p=.63) also did not reach statistical significance. These are circled in red. This means that genders attributed sentencing similarly and the participants attributed sentencing similarly in scenarios that featured different racial pairings. Since there was no interaction effect, it means the main effects collectively explain all of the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Discussion

The researcher predicted that there would be a significant difference between males' and females' responses and also a significant difference between the participants' responses to each attribution question as a result of the different racial pairings they received.

Believability

The hypothesis was both supported with regard to racial pairings and falsified with regard to participant gender in terms of the attribution of believability. There was no statistically significant main effect for the different gender and the interaction effect. This means that males and females did not differ in terms of their attribution of believability. There was a statistically significant main effect for the groups indicating that the different racial pairings affected the attribution of believability. The mean for each group was as follows (1 = completely believes female, 5 = completely believes male): Group 1 (WV/WP): 2.90; Group 2 (WV/BP): 3.32; Group 3 (BV/WP): 2.65; Group 4 (BV/BP): 2.74. All of the means except for Group 2 are roughly in the same range, so Group 2 is statistically interesting. This contention is supported by the multiple comparisons analysis which found that Group 2 had a statistically significant interaction with all the other groups. Group 2 represents the racial pairing of White victim/Black perpetrator. This means that respondents, both male and female, believed the Black male more than the White female at a statistical significance when compared to the

other racial pairings. The results for the groups correlates with previous literature which states that 1) when victims are assaulted by a perpetrator outside of their race, they are attributed more blame and their refusals of rape are deemed less credible and this is consistent for both Black and White victims (George & Martinez, 2002); 2) Additionally, juror bias can be especially pronounced when an alleged White victim accuses a Black defendant of rape (Bryden et al., 1997; Clay, 1993). The results challenged previous trends in literature in terms of gender, which states that women are more likely to believe an accusation of rape than men (Bryden et al., 2007). In the study men and women believed the accusation of rape at statistically similar rates.

Responsibility

The hypothesis was falsified in terms of the attribution of responsibility. There was no statistically significant main effect for the different groups, gender and the interaction effect. This means that males and females did not differ in terms of their attribution of responsibility. This also means that the groups that received different racial pairings did not differ in terms of their attribution of responsibility. This result challenges the literature trend in general and a previous study specifically that found that female participants were more likely to see the perpetrator as more responsible and to be more empathetic towards the victim than men (Knight, Giuliano, Sanchez-Ross, 2001; Grubb & Harrower, 2008). It also contests the trend in the literature which notes a positive relationship between racial dissimilarities and the attribution of guilt and/or negative traits (Ugwuegbu, 1976; Donovan, 2007).

Sentencing

The hypothesis was also falsified in terms of the attribution of sentencing. There was no statistically significant main effect for the different groups, gender and the interaction effect. This means that males and females did not differ in terms of their sentencing decisions. This also means that the groups that received different racial pairings did not differ in terms of their sentencing decisions. These results are inconsistent with the findings of previous studies which found that men recommended harsher sentences for Black perpetrators when compared to White perpetrators (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005) and also that women give harsher sentence recommendations than males (Knight et al., 2001; Grubb et al., 2008). It also challenges the findings of a previous study that found that Black participants, both male and female, were more lenient on Black

defendants than White defendants (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). This result was particularly curious as the Sommers & Ellsworth article corresponds with previous research and actual rape trial cases.

Limitations of Research

Generalizability of Results

Limitations of this research project are attributed to generalizability:

(1) Respondents are all from Atlanta, Georgia and may not be reflective of other region's views; (2)

Participants' responses may not be the general attitude of the racial category to which they belong to; (3) the study did not use a large sample; the small sample may affect the generalizability of the results; (4) The specific scenario, involving a boxing champion and a beauty queen, might have changed participants' perceptions.

Conclusions

In general, the findings of the study were inconsistent with literature trends. The results indicate that race and gender, in general, did not have an impact on attribution for this population of African-American students. The results can be interpreted using the primary lens of race, post-racial/gender theory, or connotative effects as the explanation for the departure from literature trends.

Race

As previously mentioned, a predominately White sample is almost always used in rape attribution studies. Thus, the results may demarcate racial differences in attribution. In the study, men and women tended to give similar scores, instead of women believing women and men believing men. This may denote that Blacks in the sample have a much higher instance of gender egalitarianism when compared to White populations used in other studies. Also, the race of perpetrator and victim had no influence on the attribution of "responsibility" and "sentencing," where previous studies found White participants more likely to blame or punish a subject of a different race than themselves. This may be explained as the Blacks in the study having a much higher instance of racial egalitarianism when compared to White populations used in other studies. Interestingly, in the condition with black perpetrator/white victim, subjects believed the man more than the woman at statistically significant rates, but still held him as responsible and punished him similarly when compared to

the scenarios with the other racial pairings. This may be explained as Blacks' racial and gender egalitarianism being suspended as a cause of the historical legacy of Black men being unjustifiably accused of rape by White women. Black men and women in the sample may be more inclined to believe that the Black man is victimized in our society in general, and particularly, by White women who use Black men as a scapegoat. Interestingly, the bias did not transcend to attribution of "responsibility", and more crucially, "sentencing" which serves as a testament to the sample's ability to separate personal bias from recommending a fair punishment.

Post Racial/Gender Theory

Instead of race, the aforementioned differences with previous studies could reflect cultural changes over time, the beginnings of post-racial and post-gendered society (Squires, 2007; Wise, 2010; Gillespie, 2010; Kimmel, 2011). According to Grubb et al. the literature itself is biased towards the findings of the time frame 1970-1980s; the "observable decline in published social psychological research [on the subject] over the past fifteen years" has caused the overrepresentation of this period in the literature (Grubb et al., 2008, p. 402). This notion is given credence by the fact that 92% of responses showed no racial or gender bias. Additionally, the disparity with previous studies could have been supplemented by the demographic used in the study. Respondents were from Atlanta, GA and the regional area may incline them to more liberal perspectives. This explanation could be further solidified by comparing the Black sample to other racial groups in order to observe if post-racial/gendered attribution are evident in these samples as well. If post racial/gendered attribution is not apparent in the other racial sample then it would seem to nullify the notion that modern societal values instead of the participants' race precludes post-racial/gendered attribution.

Connotative Effects

Instead of race and the acceptance of post-racial/gendered values, the aforementioned differences with previous studies could have been caused by the modern expectation of egalitarianism associated with evaluating the questions in the study. In this instance, the result of mostly unbiased responses would not necessarily indicate a lack of bias. This phenomenon can be outlined as follows: the connotations associated with each word ("sentencing", "responsibility" and "believability") elicit either an internal or external

obligation perceived by the participant, and depending on the response activates a normative response (external) or a biased response (internal) from the participant. The study noted that the only statistically significant finding in the study related to the believability attribution of the Group 2, White victim/Black perpetrator pairing. Using this framework, the results would be explained as follows: the connotations of “sentencing” and “responsibility” activated the normative racial and gender attitudes held by the respondents. However, the connotations of “believability” allow a bias to be observable and in the study it was specifically the White victim/Black perpetrator pairing that interrupted egalitarianism.

Analyzing the results of the study through the lens of connotative effects, the connotations of the terms “responsibility” and “sentencing” would be categorized as activating a normative response. This is due to the external obligation to fairness perceived by the participant: responsibility denotes a cultural obligation to the modern expectation of egalitarianism amongst genders and sentencing marks a judicial obligation to objectivity. In contrast, the word “believability” represents an internal obligation; the participant must decide who he/she personally believes, which does not necessitate fairness as this decision may be perceived as not being able to have negative implications on an external body or the external body negatively categorizing the participant. Explained more definitively, participants have the opportunity to express bias by unfairly believing one race over the other without “causing harm” to themselves or others. For example, one could believe the black victim more than the black perpetrator at statistically significant rates. As long as one does not sentence the man longer, which would seem to imply that one held him more responsible, the person has not negatively affected an external body (in this case, the perpetrator). Also, since the bias was not reflected in sentencing, and by implication the attribution of responsibility, it would seem to greatly lessen the likelihood that one would be negatively categorized by an external body (in this case, being called a racist by others). Hence, the connotations of “believability” allows racial prejudices to have the opportunity to come to the forefront while “responsibility” and “sentencing” do not because bias cannot be expressed without consequence. In relation to the study, the mostly post-racial/gendered responses do not necessarily indicate a lack of bias and allow for the possibility that participants were fair, simply, because they felt obligated to be.

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